

SŪRAH 64

Al-Taghābun

(Mutual Loss and Gain)

Prologue

In subject matter, images and import, this *sūrah* is very similar to those revealed in Makkah, particularly in its opening section. Indeed, the overall atmosphere that characterizes the *sūrahs* revealed in Madīnah begins to appear only in its concluding section.

The verses from the beginning up to the direct address to the believers in verse 14 aim to establish the foundations of faith and to instil the Islamic concept. Employing the style of Makkan *sūrahs*, it addresses the unbelievers directly, presenting its theme to them. It uses the same universal and psychological effects and portrays images of the destruction of earlier communities that denied God's messages. It also presents images of the Day of Judgement, emphatically confirming resurrection. This indicates that the addressees denied it altogether.

The last verses, from 14 to 18, address the believers in a manner similar to that used in *sūrahs* revealed in Madīnah, urging them to spend their money in the service of God's cause, and warning them against failure in the test that their riches and children represent. Similar addresses can be found in many *sūrahs* of the Madīnah period, and this because of the problems faced by the fledgling Muslim community there. This address also includes a comforting aspect to help the Muslims bear with patience any reversals, calamities or burdens; all these are attributed to

God's will. This is the concept these *sūrah*s seek to confirm, particularly after the command given to the Muslim community to fight for God's cause and what this involves of sacrifice.

Several reports suggest that this *sūrah* was revealed in Makkah, but other reports, given more weight, state that it was in fact a Madīnan revelation. I almost leaned to the view that it was Makkan, because of the style of its earlier sections and its general ambience. Eventually, however, I decided to stick to the more preponderant view that its revelation was Madīnan. There is nothing to preclude those earlier sections from addressing the unbelievers after the Prophet's migration to Madīnah, whether those unbelievers were the people of Makkah or others living closer to Madīnah. Likewise, there is nothing to exclude the possibility that Madīnan *sūrah*s should at times clarify the fundamentals of faith and the Islamic concept of life, using the same style that we find in what was revealed in Makkah.



Al-Taghābūn (Mutual Loss and Gain)

*In the Name of God, the Lord of
Grace, the Ever Merciful*

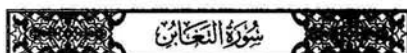
All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extol the limitless glory of God; all sovereignty belongs to Him and all praise is due to Him. He has power over all things. (1)

It is He who has created you, yet some of you are unbelievers and some do believe. God sees all that you do. (2)

He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth, and fashioned you, giving you a comely appearance. To Him all shall return. (3)

He knows what is in the heavens and the earth; and He knows what you conceal and what you reveal. God has full knowledge of the secrets of all hearts. (4)

Have you not heard of those who disbelieved in earlier times? They tasted the evil consequences of their own doings. Painful suffering still awaits them. (5)



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
قَدِيرٌ ﴿١﴾

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ فَمِنْكُمْ كَافِرٌ وَمِنْكُمْ
مُؤْمِنٌ وَاللَّهُ يَمَاتَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢﴾

خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ وَصَوَّرَكُمْ
فَاحْسَنَ صُورَكُمْ وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٣﴾

يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَيَعْلَمُ
مَا تُسْرُونَ وَمَا تُعْلِنُونَ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ
الْصُّدُورِ ﴿٤﴾

أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَبُؤُا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ
فَذَاقُوا بَالِ أَمْرِهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٥﴾

That is because their messengers came to them with clear signs, but they said, 'Shall mere mortals be our guides?' So, they denied the truth and turned away. God is free of all need. God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise. (6)

The unbelievers allege that they will not be raised from the dead. Say, 'Yes indeed! By my Lord, you will certainly be raised from the dead, and then you will certainly be told of all that you have done. This is easy for God.' (7)

Believe then in God and His Messenger, and in the light which We have bestowed from on high. God is fully aware of what you do. (8)

[Think of] the time when He will gather you all together for the Day of the Gathering, the day of mutual loss and gain. For anyone who shall have believed in God and done what is right, He will efface his bad deeds and will admit him into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide for ever. That is the supreme triumph. (9)

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُ كَانَتْ تَأْتِيهِمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ
فَقَالُوا أَأَبْشَرُ مِنْكُمْ وَنَا فَكَفَرُوا وَتَوَلَّوْا
وَآسَئَغَى اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ غَفِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿٦﴾

زَعَمَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ لَنْ يُعْزَوْا قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي
لَتُعْزَنَ ثُمَّ لَنُنَبِّئَنَّ بِمَا عَمِلْتُمْ وَذَٰلِكَ عَلَى
اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٧﴾

فَتَأْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالنُّورَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلْنَا
وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٨﴾

يَوْمَ يَجْمَعُكُمْ لِيَوْمِ الْجَمْعِ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمُ النَّعَابِ
وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ وَعَمِلْ صَالِحًا يُكَفِّرْ عَنْهُ
سَيِّئَاتِهِ وَيُدْخِلْهُ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ذَٰلِكَ
الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

But those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations are destined for the fire where they will abide. How miserable an end! (10)

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا
أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ خَالِدِينَ
فِيهَا وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٠﴾

No calamity can ever befall anyone except by God's leave. He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him. God has full knowledge of all things. (11)

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ، وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ
شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

So obey God, and obey the Messenger. If you turn away, know that Our Messenger's only duty is to deliver his message in full clarity. (12)

وَاطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَاطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ فَإِنْ
تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَىٰ رَسُولِنَا الْبَلَاغُ
الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٢﴾

God: there is no deity other than Him. In God, then, let the believers place their trust. (13)

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَىٰ اللَّهِ فليتوكَّلِ
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

Believers, some of your spouses and children are enemies to you; so beware of them. Yet if you overlook their faults, pardon and forgive, God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful. (14)

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَرْوَاحِكُمْ
وَأَوْلَدِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ
وَلِإِنْ تَعَفَّوْا وَتَصْفَحُوا وَتَغْفِرُوا
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٤﴾

Your wealth and children are only a trial and a temptation, whereas with God there is a great reward. (15)

إِنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ
وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٥﴾

Therefore, remain God-fearing as best as you can, listen, obey and be charitable. That will be best for you. Those that are preserved from their own meanness are the ones who will achieve success. (16)

فَاَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ وَاَسْمَعُوا
وَاَطِيعُوا وَاَنْفِقُوا خَيْرًا لِّاَنْفُسِكُمْ
وَمَنْ يُوقِ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُقْلِحُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

If you make a goodly loan to God, He will repay you in multiples, and will forgive you your sins. God is ever thankful, forbearing. (17)

اِنْ تَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا
يُضَاعِفْهُ لَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ
وَاللَّهُ شَكُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧﴾

He knows all that is beyond the reach of human perception and all that is witnessed; the Almighty, the Wise. (18)

عَلِيمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ الْعَزِيزُ
الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١٨﴾

The Creator and His Creation

The first section of the *sūrah* aims to establish the proper concept of the universe based on faith, present the true bond between the Creator and the universe He has created, and mention some of God's names and attributes as well as their effect on the universe and on human life:

All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extol the limitless glory of God; all sovereignty belongs to Him and all praise is due to Him. He has power over all things. It is He who has created you, yet some of you are unbelievers and some do believe. God sees all that you do. He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth, and fashioned you, giving you a comely appearance. To Him all shall return. He knows what is in the heavens and the earth; and He knows what you conceal and what you reveal. God has full knowledge of the secrets of all hearts. (Verses 1–4)

This concept is one hundred per cent accurate: it depicts what believers have always known and followed. All divine messages have preached the concept of God's oneness and His creation of everything in the universe. They all make it clear that God takes care of everyone and everything in the universe. We have no doubt about this, since the Qur'ān confirms the same about all God's messengers and the messages they advocated. Hence, we pay little attention to what we find today in distorted scriptures or to what is written on comparative religion by people who do not believe in the Qur'ān, in whole or in part. Deviation from the true divine faith is the result of what has been introduced by some followers of these messages, giving the appearance that they did not preach the pure concept of God's oneness, or that God is not in full control and direct contact with every creature. All this is deviation and does not belong to the original form of any divine religion, which remains the same from the first to the last of God's messages. It is impossible that God should have sent down a religion that is in conflict with these essential principles, as alleged by scriptures that have been distorted.

This pure concept allows the human mind to understand, as best as it can, the true nature of Godhead, feel the power of the Almighty, and recognize it in everything we see in the universe. We can thus see the work of this supreme power within ourselves, live within its scope, and appreciate its effects that cannot be removed from our senses or our minds. We see it encompassing everything, conducting all affairs, controlling all events, taking care of all. Nothing escapes it, small or large, trivial or important. This means that the human heart will always be highly sensitive, truly alert, entertaining feelings of apprehension and expectation, fear and hope. Thus man goes about life, looking up to God with every move and every action, feeling His power and realizing that He sees all, watches all and controls all. Yet He is also ever merciful to all and bestows His grace on everyone and in all situations.

Moreover, this concept enables us to feel that the entire universe turns to its Lord. So, we turn with the universe and join it in extolling God's limitless glory. We realize that the whole universe is controlled by God's will, subject to His wisdom, and so we submit to His law. This is why we describe it as a universal concept of faith. Its universality is

emphasized in a variety of ways throughout the Qur'ān. A clear example can be found in the concluding verses of *Sūrah* 59, The Gathering, discussed in Volume XVI.

God's Limitless Power

"All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extol the limitless glory of God; all sovereignty belongs to Him and all praise is due to Him." (Verse 1) Everything in the heavens and the earth turns towards their Lord, extolling His limitless glory and praising Him. The heart of this universe is a believing heart, and the soul of everything that exists is a believer. God owns all, and they all know this truth. God is praised in Himself, glorified by all His creation. When man alone stands in the midst of this great universe rebelling against the truth, cold-hearted, spiritless, turning away from his Lord and Master, refusing to glorify Him, he is at odds with all, discarded by all.

"He has power over all things." (Verse 1) His is absolute, limitless and unrestricted power. The Qur'ān impresses this truth on every believer's heart. As the believer recognizes its significance, he knows that placing his trust in God alone means that he relies on the power that can do and achieve everything, without limit or restriction. This understanding of God's power and His glorification and praise by all that exists is part of the universal concept of faith Islam formulates.

The second point penetrates deep into the human heart. It is man alone who stands in the midst of the universe in two states of belief and unbelief, while all the universe believes in its Creator, and extols His limitless glory and praise: *"It is He who has created you, yet some of you are unbelievers and some do believe."* (Verse 2) It is by God's will and through His power that man was originated. He gave him the ability to turn to or away from faith. Thus man is distinguished among God's creation by this dual ability. Hence, he is assigned the great trust and momentous responsibility of faith. Therefore, God has honoured this creature by giving him the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood; furthermore, the choice is up to him. He has also given him the standard by which he can evaluate his own actions and determine his way. This standard is the religion God revealed to human messengers. In this way,

God has helped man to shoulder the trust assigned to him, depriving him of nothing that he needs. "*God sees all that you do.*" (Verse 2) He watches man's actions, knows his true intentions and the direction he takes. Let man, then, go about life alert to the fact that he is watched by the One who sees all. This concept of man's nature is part of the clear and straightforward Islamic concept of man's position in the universe, as well as his abilities and responsibilities towards the Creator of the universe.

The third point emphasizes the truth that is inherent in the nature of the universe and which ensures the proper functioning of the heavens and the earth. It also highlights the fine beauty of God's creation as seen in the creation of man himself. It also makes it clear that all creatures will ultimately return to Him: "*He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth, and fashioned you, giving you a comely appearance. To Him all shall return.*" (Verse 3)

The first sentence in this verse, "*He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth,*" implants in a believer's mind that the truth is firmly established in the very foundation of this universe. It is neither transitory nor incidental. The very structure of the universe is founded on this basis. This is stated by none other than God who created the heavens and the earth and knows what foundation He has given them. When this fact is firmly settled in our consciousness, it gives us total reassurance about the basis of our faith: it is the same truth that serves as the foundation of the universe. This means that this faith must inevitably triumph, and must remain pure and well established. Whatever else is false and will certainly be swept away.

Another fact is stated in the same verse, "*and [He] fashioned you, giving you a comely appearance.*" This gives man the feeling that he has special privilege with God who has bestowed on him the blessing of a comely appearance, both physically and spiritually. Man is the most perfected creature on earth in respect of his physical constitution and his spiritual qualities, which also entails marvellous secrets. Hence, he has been placed in charge of the earth, which is a vast area by human standards. A careful glance at man's general physical constitution, or at any of his physical systems, is sufficient to portray this fact most clearly: God "*fashioned you, giving you a comely appearance.*" It is an

appearance that combines beauty and perfection. The beauty varies between one physical form and another, but the design itself is so beautiful and so well executed, that it enables all functions and qualities that distinguish man above all other living creatures to work together perfectly.

“To Him all shall return.” Every thing, situation and creature will return to Him. The ultimate destiny of the universe and with it the ultimate destiny of man is with Him. It is from His will that they originated and to Him they will return. He is the First and the Last who holds every thing from its both ends, the beginning and the end. He, in His limitless glory, is not restricted by anything.

The fourth point in the opening section of the *sūrah* describes God's perfect knowledge that includes all and every thing. He is fully aware of what man declares and what he conceals, and knows what is even more deeply hidden than the deepest and closest of secrets. He knows what people entertain deep in their hearts: *“He knows what is in the heavens and the earth; and He knows what you conceal and what you reveal. God has full knowledge of the secrets of all hearts.”* (Verse 4) When this fact is firmly established in man's mind it gives him a better knowledge of his Lord, contributing to his concept of the universe. It influences his feelings. He leads his life fully aware that God knows all there is to know about him, including his most secret thoughts and unexpressed feelings.

The three verses that follow the first are enough to enable man to live with the full awareness of the truth of his existence and that of the universe around him. He will also be aware of the bond he has with his Lord, how he should behave towards Him and how to fear Him in every situation in which he finds himself.

The Unbelievers' Objections

The second section reminds us of the fate of earlier communities that denied God's messages and the signs He gave them. They objected to the fact that God assigned His messages to human messengers, in the same way as the idolaters in Makkah objected to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) and denied all the clear proof he put before them:

Have you not heard of those who disbelieved in earlier times? They tasted the evil consequences of their own doings. Painful suffering still awaits them. That is because their messengers came to them with clear signs, but they said, 'Shall mere mortals be our guides?' So, they denied the truth and turned away. God is free of all need. God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise. (Verses 5-6)

The addressees here are, most probably, the unbelievers. They are reminded of the fates suffered by earlier communities who denied the truth, and warned against a similar fate. The interrogative form is adopted either as a denunciation of their stubbornness after they have been given such information or it is used to draw their attention to this same history that relates to them. They were fully aware of what happened to some of these communities, such as the 'Ād, Thamūd and the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, they passed by them in their trips to the north and south of Arabia.

The Qur'ān mentions their fate in this life and states what awaits them in the life to come: "*Painful suffering still awaits them.*" (Verse 5) It then explains why they deserved what happened to them and what they are still to face: "*That is because their messengers came to them with clear signs, but they said, 'Shall mere mortals be our guides?'*" (Verse 6) It is the same objection voiced by the Makkan idolaters to the Prophet. It is an arrogant objection that betrays a total ignorance of the nature of the divine message and its being a code to be implemented in human life. Hence, it must be practically represented in a human being, in the Messenger who lives according to it and presents a model of its implementation. Thus, others will then be able to mould their own lives in the same way, and to the best of their abilities. Were the Messenger to belong to any other than the human race, people would not have had a practical example against which to mould their feelings and lives. Moreover, this objection betrays ignorance of the true nature of man and his elevated status, which enables him to receive and deliver a divine message instead of God assigning it to an angel, as the unbelievers frequently suggested. Man carries the spirit of God breathed into him when God first created Adam. This prepares him to receive God's message and to deliver it complete as he receives it from

on high. This is an honour bestowed on the human race, rejected only by those who are ignorant of the high status God gives to man when, within his own personal world, he gives full effect to this breath of God's spirit in him. Furthermore, the objection reflects the arrogance and false pride of those who refuse to follow a human messenger, as if such following would detract from the status of those ignorant, arrogant unbelievers. To them, it is acceptable to follow a messenger who belongs to a different kind of creature, but to follow one from their own ranks is too unbecoming.

Therefore, they disbelieved in God's messengers and turned away from them, rejecting the clear proofs and signs that they brought them. Their pride, combined with their ignorance of human nature, stood as a barrier preventing them from accepting the truth. Thus, they chose to turn away from God's guidance and to disbelieve in Him. "*So, they denied the truth and turned away.*" (Verse 6)

"*God is free of all need. God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.*" (Verse 6) He does not need that they should accept His guidance, nor does He need their worship. Indeed, He needs nothing from them or from anyone else. He is free of all need.

Such is the story of those who in earlier times denied God's messages and were made to taste the fruits of their unbelief. It also explains the reasons behind what happened to them and what awaits them in the life to come. How can present generations follow in their footsteps and deny the truth now? How can they risk a similar fate?

The Truth of Resurrection

The third section carries the theme of the previous one further, stating the situation of those unbelievers who deny the resurrection. It is clearly apparent that these were the idolaters whom the Prophet addressed, calling on them to believe in his message. This section instructs the Prophet to confirm, most emphatically, to them that the resurrection will certainly take place. Indeed, it adds a scene from the Day of Judgement that depicts the fates of the two groups who either deny or accept it. It calls on them to believe, obey and attribute everything that happens in the world to God Almighty:

The unbelievers allege that they will not be raised from the dead. Say, 'Yes indeed! By my Lord, you will certainly be raised from the dead, and then you will certainly be told of all that you have done. This is easy for God.' Believe then in God and His Messenger, and in the light which We have bestowed from on high. God is fully aware of what you do. [Think of] the time when He will gather you all together for the Day of the Gathering, the day of mutual loss and gain. For anyone who shall have believed in God and done what is right, He will efface his bad deeds and will admit him into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide for ever. That is the supreme triumph. But those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations are destined for the fire where they will abide. How miserable an end! No calamity can ever befall anyone except by God's leave. He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him. God has full knowledge of all things. So obey God, and obey the Messenger. If you turn away, know that Our Messenger's only duty is to deliver his message in full clarity. God: there is no deity other than Him. In God, then, let the believers place their trust. (Verses 7–13)

Right from the start the *sūrah* describes the unbelievers' argument as an 'allegation', thereby branding it as a lie. It follows this with a directive to the Prophet to assert his message of resurrection most emphatically, swearing by his Lord to its truth. Nothing can be more emphatic than an oath the Prophet makes by his Lord. "*Say: Yes indeed! By my Lord, you will certainly be raised from the dead, and then you will certainly be told of all that you have done.*" (Verse 7) Nothing of it will suffer neglect. God knows their deeds better than they do, so He will tell them all about it on the Day of Resurrection. "*This is easy for God.*" He knows all that is in the heavens and the earth, open and secret, as well as what is in people's hearts, expressed or otherwise. He also has power over all things, as stated earlier in the *sūrah*.

The *sūrah* then calls on them to believe in God and His Messenger, and in the light He has given His Messenger, which is the Qur'ān and the faith embodied in the Qur'ān. It is indeed light, since it comes from God, and "*God is the light of the heavens and the earth.*" (24: 35) The Qur'ān enlightens the heart to make it shine, able to see the truth

inherent within it: "*Believe then in God and His Messenger, and in the light which We have bestowed from on high.*" (Verse 8) This call on them to believe is followed by a comment that makes them realize that their situation is fully observed by God: "*God is fully aware of what you do.*" (Verse 8)

The next verse continues to draw the scene of the Day of Resurrection: "*[Think of] the time when He will gather you all together for the Day of the Gathering, the day of mutual loss and gain.*" (Verse 9) It is called the Day of the Gathering because all creatures from all generations are gathered together on that day, which is also attended by the angels. Only God knows the numbers of the angels, but we may have a sense of it when we reflect on the following *ḥadīth* in which Abū Dharr quotes the Prophet as saying: "I see and hear what you do not. The heavens is noisily bustling, and rightly so: there is not a four-finger width in it but occupied by an angel with his forehead placed low in prostration before God. Were you to know what I know, you would have laughed but a little and wept much, and you would not have enjoyed being in bed with women. You would have gone up the hills and mountains earnestly appealing to God. I wish I were a tree to be felled." [Related by al-Tirmidhī.] The heaven in which there is an angel in every little space of four fingers is this great expanse for which we know no limit, and in which a sun like ours appears to be no more than a fine particle floating in the air. Does this then give us an approximation for the number of angels in it? Furthermore, all these angels will form part of the assembled mass of creatures on the Day of Gathering.

It will be in front of this great assembly that the loss and gain will take place: the believers will take all happiness purely for themselves while the unbelievers will be totally deprived of it before being sent to hell. These are two greatly different lots. The sense we receive is that of a competition where the winners take all. Hence, each side wants to deprive its competitors. The believers end up winners and the unbelievers losers. This is what is meant by 'mutual loss and gain', as explained in the same verse and that which follows: "*For anyone who shall have believed in God and done what is right, He will efface his bad deeds and will admit him into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide for ever. That is the supreme triumph. But those who disbelieve*

and deny Our revelations are destined for the fire where they will abide. How miserable an end!" (Verses 9–10)

Before completing the call to them to believe, the *sūrah* states one of the main elements of the Islamic faith, which is to believe in God's will and the effect of belief in God on the human heart: "*No calamity can ever befall anyone except by God's leave. He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him. God has full knowledge of all things.*" (Verse 11)

Perhaps this fact is stated here only to put it clearly within the context of the faith they are called upon to adopt. It is a belief that attributes everything to God, and whatever good or evil takes place occurs only by God's will. This is an essential fact without which faith is incomplete. It is indeed the basis of all feelings a believer may have when facing life events and situations, good and happy or bad and miserable. On the other hand, this fact is stated here in response to something that took place and was clear in people's minds at the time of the revelation of this *sūrah* or this verse. Regardless of the exact situation, this fact represents an important aspect of the concept Islam implants in a believer's consciousness. He thus feels God's hand behind every event and every move. He receives with a calm heart whatever happens to him, whether it brings him happiness or adversity. He expresses his gratitude in the first case and demonstrates patience in the second. Alternatively, he may rise to a higher level, expressing his thanks to God in both cases of happiness and adversity, feeling that both bring him God's blessings. He then sees adversity as a reminder for him or an occasion that may bring him forgiveness of past sins or an increase in his reward. In an authentic *ḥadīth*, the Prophet is quoted as saying: "Amazing is the believer's situation: whatever God determines is good for him. Should he meet with adversity, he resorts to patience and this is good for him, while if he meets with what is pleasant, he expresses his gratitude to God, and this is good for him. This situation applies to no one other than a believer." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.]

"*He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him.*" (Verse 11) Some commentators explain this as meaning belief in God's will and being resigned to it in the event of facing a calamity. Ibn 'Abbās, however, takes this statement as indicating complete guidance granted to believing hearts, making them recognize the absolute truth. Thus

they attribute all things and all events to God, their source and goal. This provides them with reassurance and comfort. With such a complete and comprehensive vision, they are not encumbered by a partial view that may be deficient or erroneous. Hence, the comment at the end of the verse: *"God has full knowledge of all things."* (Verse 11) It is, then, guidance to a share of God's knowledge. God grants this guidance to a person who truly believes, thus earning the prize of knowing something of what lies beyond this limited human life.

The *sūrah* continues with its call on people to believe, calling them now to obey God and His Messenger: *"So obey God, and obey the Messenger. If you turn away, know that Our Messenger's only duty is to deliver his message in full clarity."* (Verse 12) The *sūrah* has already shown them the end suffered by earlier communities who turned away. Now it tells them that the role of God's Messenger is only to deliver His message. When he has done this, he has fulfilled the trust assigned to him and put the proof before them. What remains is the fate merited by those who are stubborn in disobedience and rejection. They have already been reminded of this.

This section concludes by restating the truth of God's oneness, which they persistently deny. It also states the believers' attitude in dealing with God: *"God: there is no deity other than Him. In God, then, let the believers place their trust."* (Verse 13) The truth of God's oneness is the essence of faith. Its practical import is to place one's total trust in God and to rely on Him alone. This verse provides a bridge between these sections of the *sūrah* and its final one which comes as an address to the believers.

Spouses and Children as Enemies

In the final section the *sūrah* addresses the believers, warning them against failure in the test represented in the temptation spouses, children and riches offer. They are required to remain God-fearing, be obedient to Him and give willingly for His cause. They are warned against being stingy. They are further promised the doubling of their provisions, forgiveness of their sins and success. They are finally reminded of God's all-encompassing knowledge, power and wisdom:

Believers, some of your spouses and children are enemies to you; so beware of them. Yet if you overlook their faults, pardon and forgive, God is much-forgiving, ever merciful. Your wealth and children are only a trial and a temptation, whereas with God there is a great reward. Therefore, remain God-fearing as best as you can, listen, obey and be charitable. That will be best for you. Those that are preserved from their own meanness are the ones who will achieve success. If you make a goodly loan to God, He will repay you in multiples, and will forgive you your sins. God is ever thankful, forbearing. He knows all that is beyond the reach of human perception and all that is witnessed; the Almighty, the Wise. (Verses 14–18)

A man asked Ibn ‘Abbās about the first verse in this section and it is reported that he told him that there were some people in Makkah who accepted Islam and wanted to join the Prophet in Madinah, but their spouses and children prevented them. When they ultimately joined him, they realized that those who were already with the Prophet had acquired insight in their religion. Therefore, they wanted to punish their spouses and children for having kept them away. God then revealed this verse telling them: “*If you overlook their faults, pardon and forgive, God is much-forgiving, ever merciful.*” (Verse 14) This *ḥadīth* is related by al-Tirmidhī who describes it as authentic. The same opinion is expressed by ‘Ikrimah, Ibn ‘Abbās’s disciple.

The Qur’ānic statement is wider in scope and import than this particular situation represents. For this warning is the same as that in the following verse: “*Your wealth and children are only a trial and a temptation.*” (Verse 15) Both caution against the temptation that wives, children and wealth present. The warning that some spouses and children may be one’s enemies refers to a true fact in human life. In this way, the verses touch upon some intricate and complex ties in man’s emotions and how they are influenced by life’s circumstances. Spouses and children may divert a person’s attention from God’s remembrance. They may also make a man fall short of discharging the responsibilities required of his faith; this in order to spare himself the troubles that he may face as a result of fulfilling such responsibilities. A person who strives for God’s cause may be exposed to much loss and may have to sacrifice a

great deal. He and his family may have to withstand much hardship. He may be willing to face such hardship himself, but cannot bear that such hardship be suffered by his wife and children. As a result, he may be tight-fisted and cowardly in order to ensure that they are safe, free of trouble and financially secure. Thus, they become his enemies as they turn him away from doing what is good and stop him from fulfilling the ultimate objective of his existence. Indeed, they may even stand in his way, stopping him from fulfilling his duty. In doing so, they may wish to spare themselves what may happen as a result, or they may not share his belief. In this way, man finds himself unable to separate himself from them and dedicate himself to God's cause. This is also a form of enmity that may vary in degrees. Furthermore, such situations are faced by believers at all times.

This very complex situation merits such a caution from God as to alert believers' hearts so that they do not allow such feelings and pressures to creep into their minds. The caution is stated again, this time as a warning against the temptation presented by wealth and children. The Arabic word used here is *fitnah*, which conveys two meanings. The first is 'trial', which makes the verse mean that God puts you to trial by giving you riches and children. He tests you in this way, so always be on the alert in order to pass your test and dedicate yourself to God. The second meaning is 'temptation', and in this sense the verse means that riches and children present temptations for you to indulge in sin. Beware then and do not allow such temptations to distract you from the way that leads to God's acceptance. Both meanings are acceptable.

Imām Aḥmad relates on the authority of Buraydah, a Companion of the Prophet: "The Prophet was delivering a sermon when al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn came wearing two red shirts and tripping as they walked. The Prophet got down from the pulpit and took them up, placing them next to him. He then said: 'God and His Messenger speak the truth: *Your wealth and children are only a trial and a temptation.* I saw these two young boys tripping as they walked, and I could not wait. I had to interrupt my speech to lift them up.'" Thus did the Prophet do with his two grandchildren. It is, then, a very serious matter. Therefore alerting people to it and making them aware of what it may lead to is necessary, as God, who created people and gave them their natural

feelings, knows. They can then restrain themselves so as not to allow such feelings to dictate their behaviour, knowing that such loving bonds could end up causing them what an enemy tries to cause. Therefore, when the warning is given and the encouragement is made to pass the test and to overcome the temptation, they are reminded of what God has in store for them: "*whereas with God there is a great reward.*" (Verse 15)

The believers are admonished to do their best to remain God-fearing and to obey God's orders: "*Therefore, remain God-fearing as best as you can, listen, obey and be charitable.*" (Verse 16) Here we see an aspect of God's care as He restricts what is expected of the believers to that which remains within their power and ability. He knows the limit of what they can do in obedience of Him. The Prophet says: "When I give you an order, do it as best you can, and when I prohibit something, refrain from it completely." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.] Limits cannot be set on obeying an order to do something. Therefore, what is within one's ability and power is sufficient. On the other hand, prohibition cannot be divided. It is required in full.

They are also called upon to be generous in what they donate: "*And be charitable. That will be best for you.*" (Verse 16) Normally, they spend their money on their own needs. God instructs them to spend in charity what is good for themselves. Thus, when they are charitable, they are actually spending their money on what is good for themselves. The *sūrah* also depicts meanness as a plague, one they must try to get rid of. He is happy who manages to achieve this: "*Those that are preserved from their own meanness are the ones who will achieve success.*" (Verse 16)

The *sūrah* goes on encouraging them to be charitable, making it desirable for them. It describes such charity as a loan given to God. Who would want to lose the opportunity to give his Master a loan? God accepts the loan, repays it many times over, forgives the lender his sins, thanks the lender and forbears with him when he falls short of thanking Him: "*If you make a goodly loan to God, He will repay you in multiples, and will forgive you your sins. God is ever thankful, forbearing.*" (Verse 17) Blessed be God's name: how generous and great He is! It is He who creates man, His servant, and then gives him all his provisions. He then asks him to give him as a loan some of what is surplus to his needs. He

repays this loan in multiples and thanks His servant and forbears when His servant is not as grateful to Him as he should be.

God thus teaches us how to rise above our weaknesses and shortcomings and how to aspire to the sublime, trying to be like Him, albeit within our limited abilities. God has breathed of His spirit into man, so that man will always aspire to achieve this ideal, within the scope of his nature and ability. Therefore, the sublime remains open for man always to aspire to. He can try to rise step after step so that he can meet God presenting what He likes him to present and what earns him His pleasure.

The section then concludes with a statement of God's knowledge and wisdom: "*He knows all that is beyond the reach of human perception and all that is witnessed; the Almighty, the Wise.*" (Verse 18) Everything is within His knowledge, subject to His power, conducted according to His wisdom. As they go through life, people should realize that they remain under God's watchful eye, are subject to His power, and that everything takes place by His will. When this truth is appreciated by people, they will remain God-fearing and respond to Him only as they should.

